

Newsflash! An Introduction to Reporting

Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historical Site

Pre-Visit Resources

Synopsis

Students' observational skills are put to the test when a surprising incident occurs in the classroom.

Objectives

Students will:

- Experience a surprising incident and attempt to recall their observations of the facts involved.
- Discuss why some things are difficult to remember and why different witnesses may recall things differently.
- Understand the importance of being alert and observant, using all of one's senses, when witnessing an important moment.
- Recall details about an event in response to "Who, What, Where, When, Why & How" questions.
- Write from observation using a high level of detail.
- Use an inverted triangle graphic organizer to pre-write a news story.

Materials

A classroom object, a heavy book, and an adult accomplice.

Pencils and paper for students.

Procedure

1. Make arrangements with another adult at your school to stage a surprise incident during class. Ask your accomplice to casually walk into your classroom in the middle of a lesson carrying a heavy book, and to start a conversation with you about a typical topic of conversation. In the middle of the conversation, your accomplice should suddenly drop the book, creating a loud noise. They should then grab an object (agreed upon in advance) and run from the room yelling "I got it! I got it!"

2. Allow students time to respond to the surprising "theft." Then ask students for their help in solving this mystery. Ask students to answer the following questions, writing down every detail that they recall:

Who stole the object?

What was the thief wearing?

What was stolen?

What did the thief say as he or she fled the room?

Where was the object before it was stolen?

When did the thief enter the room?
When did the thief exit the room?
Which direction did the thief go after leaving the room?
How did the thief steal the object?
Why did the thief steal the object?

These questions could be provided on a handout, dictated to students, and/or written on the board or an overhead projector.

3. Ask students to share responses for each question. Did everyone remember things in exactly the same way? Do any of the student accounts differ? What was easy to recall? What was more difficult to recall? Why?
4. Ask students to think about why these questions would be important in the case of a real crime. What about an important historical event? Reporters are witnesses to important events, so they need to use all of their senses to make observations and take notes carefully so that they can write a full and accurate description of events for others to read about later.
5. Discuss the types of questions that reporters answer in their articles: Who, What, Where, When, Why & How. Introduce the newspaper terms headline, byline, and lead (the opening paragraph that “hooks” the reader). Introduce the inverted triangle organizer. Hand out the graphic organizer sheet and ask students to organize the details of their observations of the theft they just witnessed in the inverted triangle. Discuss strategies for lead sentences and closing or concluding sentences, and ask students to write one of each for their stories.
6. If you would like to further hone student skills in close observation and writing with descriptive detail, try some of these exercises:

The Great Pencil Scramble

Each student writes a description of their pencil on an index card, using as much detail as they can possibly muster. Ask them to write their initials in small letters on the backs of their cards. Then collect all of the pencils and cards. Shuffle the cards and redistribute them to the class. Place all of the pencils in a central location. After students have read their new cards, invite small groups of students (in shifts) to look over all of the pencils and to identify the ones that match their cards (they can check with the authors to make sure they have found the correct pencils).

Imaginary Creatures

Students use colored pencils or markers to draw pictures of an imaginary creature that they invent. These can be as creative or silly as they desire! Students then write a description of their creature, using many descriptive details. Students exchange written descriptions with a partner. They then use the written description to guide them in drawing their classmate’s creature (without seeing

the original drawing). When the drawings are complete, the partners can have a conference to compare the original drawings and the ones based on the written descriptions. Ask them to discuss where their partner's writing was very helpful and detailed, and to point out places where they had questions.

Eagle Eyes!

Use a small, commonplace object like an orange, a chalkboard eraser, or a block of wood for this quick and easy game that hones observation and deductive reasoning skills. All students put their heads down and close their eyes. One student hides the object in plain sight somewhere in the classroom. When the hider gives the all-clear signal, students remain in their seats and look around the classroom. The hider then calls on classmates to ask yes or no questions about the location of the item. The hider answers questions until the object is found.

Where Is It?

Students partner up for a fun exploration of the details of setting. One student secretly thinks of a place that he or she knows the other person has been. Their partner then asks yes or no questions about the place until he or she is able to name the place. Then the partners switch roles.

NY Standards: English Language Arts

LISTENING and READING

Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding

Students will

- Select and use strategies they have been taught for note-taking, organizing, and categorizing information.
- Ask for clarification of a classmate's idea in a group discussion.
- Accurately paraphrase what they have heard or read.

SPEAKING and WRITING

Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding

Students will

- Use details, examples, anecdotes, or personal experiences to explain or clarify information.
- Include relevant information and exclude extraneous material.

LISTENING and SPEAKING

Standard 4: Social Interaction

- Listen attentively and recognize when it is appropriate for them to speak.
- Take turns speaking and respond to others' ideas in conversations on familiar topics.